



**COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF AUDITOR-CONTROLLER**

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September 17, 2009

TO: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

FROM: Wendy L. Watanabe
Auditor-Controller

SUBJECT: **ZENITH FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY CONTRACT REVIEW – A
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES PROVIDER**

We have completed a contract compliance review of Zenith Foster Family Agency (Zenith or Agency), a Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) provider.

Background

DCFS contracts with Zenith, a private non-profit community-based organization to recruit, train and certify foster parents for the supervision of children DCFS places in foster care. Once the Agency places a child, it is required to monitor the placement until the child is discharged from the program.

Zenith is required to hire qualified social workers to provide case management and act as a liaison between DCFS and foster parents. The Agency oversees a total of 32 certified foster homes in which 62 DCFS children were placed at the time of our review. Zenith is located in the Second District.

DCFS pays Zenith a negotiated monthly rate, per child placement, established by the California Department of Social Services' (CDSS) Foster Care Rates Bureau. Based on the child's age, Zenith receives between \$1,589 and \$1,865 per month, per child. Out of these funds, the Agency pays the foster parents between \$624 and \$790 per month, per child. DCFS paid Zenith approximately \$1,334,000 during Fiscal Year 2008-09.

Purpose/Methodology

The purpose of our review was to determine whether Zenith was providing the services outlined in their Program Statement and the County contract. We reviewed certified foster parent files, children's case files, personnel files and interviewed the Agency's staff. We also visited a number of certified foster homes and interviewed the children and the foster parents.

Results of Review

The foster children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations. Zenith also ensured that social workers' caseloads did not exceed the maximum established by CDSS Title 22 regulations and that staff working on the County contract possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract.

Zenith needs to ensure that foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Zenith needs to ensure foster parent certification files, Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), Quarterly Reports and Termination Reports contain all the required information. We specifically noted the following:

- Two (40%) of the five foster homes visited did not adequately secure knives and cleaning solutions. Our prior audit review also noted that Zenith did not always ensure that knives and cleaning solutions were adequately secured.
- One (20%) of the five foster parent certification files reviewed did not contain documentation of a pre-certification health screening as required by CDSS Title 22 regulations.
- Two (40%) of the five foster parent certification files reviewed contained expired First Aid certificates. At the time of our review, the First Aid certificates had been expired for five and 11 months, respectively. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided a current First Aid certificate for both of the foster parents.
- Two (40%) of the five foster parent certification files did not contain documentation of current automobile insurance. At the time of our review, the automobile insurances had been expired for four and 13 months, respectively. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided the required documentation.
- Seven (70%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed contained goals that were not specific and measurable. In addition, six (60%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed were not approved by the DCFS social workers as required. Our prior audit review also noted that NSPs

were not always approved by the DCFS social worker and that the NSPs contained goals that were not specific and measurable.

- Eight (80%) of the 10 Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a reassessment of unmet needs and efforts made to meet those needs as required by the County contract.
- Four of the Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a copy of the child's Emancipation Preparation Contract as required for children over 14 years old. At the time of our review, four children reviewed were over 14 years old.
- One (25%) of the four Termination Reports reviewed did not include a closing summary of the Agency's records relating to placement as required.

The details of our review along with recommendations for corrective action are attached.

Review of Report

We discussed our report with Zenith on July 30, 2009. In their attached response, Zenith management indicates the actions the Agency has taken to implement the recommendations (Attachment I). We also notified DCFS of the results of our review. In their response (Attachment II), DCFS indicates they will follow-up on our recommendations during their next monitoring review tentatively scheduled for October 2009.

We thank Zenith for their cooperation and assistance during this review. Please call me if you have any questions or your staff may contact Don Chadwick at (213) 253-0301.

WLW:MMO:JET:DC:AA

Attachments

- c: William T Fujioka, Chief Executive Officer
Patricia S. Ploehn, Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Ted Myers, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Susan Kerr, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Kathleen Pitman, President, Board of Directors, Zenith FFA
Deatra Handy, Program Administrator, Zenith FFA
Jean Chen, Community Care Licensing
Public Information Office
Audit Committee

**FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY PROGRAM
ZENITH FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY
FISCAL YEAR 2008-09**

BILLED SERVICES

Objective

Determine whether Zenith Foster Family Agency (Zenith or Agency) provided program services in accordance with their County contract and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We visited five of the 32 Los Angeles County certified foster homes that Zenith billed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) in September and October 2008, and interviewed five foster parents and eight children placed in the five homes. We also observed a toddler who was too young to interview. In addition, we reviewed the case files for five foster parents and ten children and reviewed the Agency's monitoring activity.

Results

The foster children indicated that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations. In addition, the toddler we observed appeared well cared for and happy.

Zenith needs to ensure foster homes are in compliance with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, Zenith needs to ensure foster parent certification files, Needs and Services Plans (NSPs), Quarterly Reports and Termination Reports contain all the required information. We specifically noted the following:

Foster Home Visitation

- Two (40%) of the five foster homes visited did not adequately secure knives and cleaning solutions. Our prior audit review also noted that Zenith did not always ensure that knives and cleaning solutions were adequately secured.

Foster Parent Certification

- One (20%) of the five foster parent certification files reviewed did not contain documentation of a pre-certification health screening as required by CDSS Title 22 regulations.

- Two (40%) of the five foster parent certification files reviewed contained expired First Aid certificates. At the time of our review, the First Aid certificates had been expired for five and 11 months, respectively. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided a current First Aid certificate for both of the foster parents.
- Two (40%) of the five foster parent certification files did not contain documentation of current automobile insurance. At the time of our review, the automobile insurances had been expired for four and 13 months, respectively. Subsequent to our review, the Agency provided the required documentation.

Needs and Services Plans

- Six (60%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed were not approved by the DCFS social workers as required.
- Seven (70%) of the 10 NSPs reviewed contained goals that were not specific and measurable.

Our prior audit review also noted that NSPs were not always approved by the DCFS social worker and that the NSPs contained goals that were not specific and measurable.

Quarterly Reports and Termination Reports

- Eight (80%) of the 10 Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a reassessment of unmet needs and efforts made to meet those needs as required by the County contract.
- Four of the Quarterly Reports reviewed did not include a copy of the child's Emancipation Preparation Contract as required for children over 14 years old. At the time of our review, four children reviewed were over 14 years old.
- One (25%) of the four Termination Reports reviewed did not include a closing summary of the Agency's records relating to placement as required.

Recommendations

Zenith management ensure:

- 1. Staff adequately monitor foster homes to ensure they comply with the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.**
- 2. Foster parents adequately secure knives, cleaning solutions and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children.**

3. Foster parent certification files contain all the required information including documentation of pre-certification health screening, valid First Aid certificates and valid automobile insurance.
4. NSPs are approved by the DCFS social workers.
5. NSPs contain all the required information including goals that are specific and measurable.
6. Quarterly Reports contain all the required information including a reassessment of unmet needs and efforts made to meet those needs and an Emancipation Preparation Contract for children who are 14 years of age and older.
7. Termination Reports include a closing summary of the Agency's records related to placement.

CLIENT VERIFICATION

Objective

Determine whether the program participants received the services that Zenith billed to DCFS.

Verification

We interviewed eight children placed in five Zenith certified foster homes and five foster parents to confirm the services Zenith billed to DCFS. In addition, we observed one toddler who was too young to interview.

Results

The foster children indicated that they felt well cared for and that they enjoyed living with their foster parents and the foster parents indicated that the services they received from the Agency generally met their expectations. In addition, the toddler we observed appeared well cared for and happy.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING/CASELOAD LEVELS**Objective**

Determine whether Zenith social workers' caseloads do not exceed 15 placements and whether the supervising social worker does not supervise more than six social workers, as required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Verification

We interviewed the Agency's administrator and reviewed caseload statistics for the Agency's social workers and supervising social worker.

Results

Overall, Zenith's six social workers carried an average caseload of 11 cases and the Agency's supervising social worker supervised six social workers.

Recommendation

None.

STAFFING QUALIFICATIONS**Objective**

Determine whether the Agency's staff possess the education and work experience qualifications required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, determine whether the Agency conducted hiring clearances prior to hiring their staff and provided ongoing training to staff.

Verification

We interviewed the Agency's administrator and reviewed each staff's personnel file for documentation to confirm their education and work experience qualifications, hiring clearances and ongoing training.

Results

The Agency's administrator, supervising social worker and social workers possessed the education and work experience required by the County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations. In addition, the Agency conducted the required hiring clearances and provided ongoing training for staff working on the County contract. However, two of Zenith's part-time contracted social workers did not sign a written declaration indicating that their total caseload would not exceed 15 placed children as required.

Recommendation

8. Zenith management ensure that contract social workers sign a written declaration indicating that their total caseload will not exceed 15 placed children.

PRIOR YEAR FOLLOW-UP

Objective

Determine the status of the recommendations reported in the Auditor-Controller's prior monitoring review.

Verification

We verified whether the outstanding recommendations from the Fiscal Year 2005-06 monitoring review were implemented. The report was issued on June 6, 2007.

Results

The prior monitoring report contained six outstanding recommendations. Zenith implemented three of the recommendations. As indicated earlier, the findings related to recommendations 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6, contained in this report were also noted in the prior monitoring review.

Recommendation

9. Zenith management implement the three outstanding recommendations from the prior monitoring report.

Zenith Foster Family Agency

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(310) 219-0466; FAX (310) 219-0607

Ella Washington, Founder

August 10, 2009

Administrative Staff

Walter Washington/Executive Director

Deatra Handy, Administrator

Nedra Jamerson, Social Worker Supervisor

Board of Directors

Kathleen Piman

Barbara Buena

Bob Buena

Doris K. Howard

Harriet Whitmore

Dr. Larry Strawn

Marvelle Wagner

Larry Williams

County Of Los Angeles

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To: Supervisor Don Knabe, Chair
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Mark Ridley Thomas
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Michael D. Antonivich

From: Deatra Handy:
Administrator

Zenith Foster Family Agency Corrective Action Plan for Auditor Controller Contract Review.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #1

Staff adequately monitor foster home to ensure they comply with County contract and CDSS Title 22 regulations.

Zenith Administrator and Supervising Social Worker will monitor the homes to ensure compliance with County Contract and Title 22 regulations by monthly home inspections conducted by social workers and monthly audits conducted by Quality Assurance.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #2

Foster parents adequately secure knives, cleaning solutions and other items that could pose a potential safety hazard to children.

The Zenith FFA social workers will conduct monthly home inspections to ensure that the knives and cleaning solutions are adequately secure. Inspection results will be reported to the Supervising Social Worker and the Administrator.
Auditor Controller

Auditor Controller Recommendation #3

Foster parent certification files contain all required information including documentation of pre-certification health screening, valid First Aid certificates and valid automobile insurance.

Zenith Quality Assurance will monitor files monthly to ensure that all required documentation is current and compliant. Quality assurance person will notify certified parents one month prior to deadline and will mandate all necessary appointments and documentation be made prior to delinquency. Quality assurance will report audit to administration to ensure compliance.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #4

NSPs are approved by the DCFS social workers.

Zenith Social workers will send all NSP's to DCFS social workers and follow up with confirmation of receipt via telephone. Zenith will make phone contact after one week if signature page has not been forwarded. Zenith worker will fax request for signature page after one week of phone call. Zenith social worker will contact DCFS supervisor after one week of phone call to request signature page with corresponding documentation.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #5

NSP contain all the required information including goals that are specific and measurable.

Zenith Supervising Social worker will review all NSP and assist social workers in ensuring that goals are specific and measurable.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #6

Quarterly reports contain all required information including reassessment of unmet need and effort made to meet those needs and an Emancipation Preparation Contract for the children who are 14 years of age and older.

Supervising social worker will assist all Zenith social workers to ensure that effort is made to assist minor in efforts to meet all needs. Zenith Administrator will prepare and implement emancipation contract in collaboration with certified parent and CSW for children who are 14 years of age and older.

Auditor Controller Recommendation #7

Termination Reports include closing summary of the agency records related to placement.

Zenith Administrator will revise termination report to include agency records related to placement.

Staffing Qualifications recommendation #8

Zenith management ensures that contract social workers sign a written declaration indication that the total caseload will not exceed fifteen placed children.

Zenith Administrator will ensure that all staff social workers will sign declaration of caseload not to exceed fifteen placed children.

Prior year follow up recommendation #9

Zenith management implement the three outstanding recommendation for the prior monitoring report.

See Zenith responses to the recommendation 1,2,4,5,6 in this report for corrective action for three outstanding recommendations for prior year monitoring report.

If you need additional information,
Please contact me at (310) 219-0466.

Deatra Handy


Program Administrator



PATRICIA S. PLOEHN, LCSW
Director

**County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

425 Shatto Place, Los Angeles, California 90020
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September 8, 2009

TO: Aggie Alonso, Chief Accountant-Auditor
Countywide Contract Monitoring Division

FROM: Elizabeth A. Howard, Section Head
Out of Home Care Management Division
Foster Family Agency/Group Home Performance Management

Board of Supervisors
GLORIA MOLINA
First District
MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS
Second District
ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Third District
DON KNABE
Fourth District
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH
Fifth District

**DCFS RESPONSE TO THE AUDITOR CONTROLLER'S CONTRACT REVIEW OF ZENITH
FOSTER FAMILY AGENCY**

The Out of Home Care Management Division (OHCMD) has reviewed the Auditor-Controller's (A-C) August 12, 2009 draft audit report of the contract compliance review of Zenith FFA. Although the report notes several programmatic issues, we noted two areas of concern. Specifically, the draft report states two of the five certified foster parent files reviewed did not contain documentation of current automobile insurance and two homes visited did not maintain secured knives and cleaning solutions.

The Auditor Controller clarified with DCFS that the two certified foster parents had no lapse in automobile coverage, but that documentation was not in the certified foster parents' file during their review. Zenith later provided the Auditor Controller with documentation of automobile insurance. The Auditor Controller approved Zenith Foster Family Agency's August 10, 2009 Corrective Action Plan which includes the agency's plan for monthly inspections to ensure that knives and cleaning solutions are secured.

As these concerns did not rise to the level of abuse, the Auditor Controller did not report these concerns to the Child Protection Hotline or the Out of Home Care Management Division. DCFS will conduct a follow up visit regarding the Auditor Controller's recommendations to determine implementation of the approved Corrective Action Plan by October 2009.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 626-569-6804.

MG:EAH:EK

c: Wendy L. Watanabe, Auditor-Controller
Patricia Ploehn, Deputy Director, DCFS
Lisa Perrish, Deputy Director, DCFS
Marilynne Garrison, Division Chief, DCFS

"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"